

## ROLE OF LIFE ON THE WRITING SKILLS OF AMIT CHAUDHURI

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### ABSTRACT

The world famous writer Amit Chaudhuri, an extremely talented and internationally acclaimed novelist, who is a well known figure of literature world, is a living motivating beacon for upcoming writers. His eloquence in observing and then catching happenings around is superbly appraised by readers. Although he loves his university of graduation, his occupation is in abroad, he met his wife there. But Calcutta is a place which makes him sad every time he goes away from it. The idea of his first novel is inspired by Chaudhuri's own experience. The beginning of this novel is inspired with a real experience of Amit Chaudhuri when he did move to the suburbs of Bombay. Amit Chaudhuri is truly attached with his country and culture and all his stories revolve around it. His life has played a very crucial role in his work. We may see various glimpse of it at many places in his creations. It was too noticed by many experts who believe that Amit is not a diaspora writer as he has eternal attachment with the life and culture of his native land.

**KEYWORDS:** Themes, Techniques, Influence, Novels, Contribution

### INTRODUCTION

Life has a significant role in Amit's writings. Bangla language and Calcutta, are supposed to be most regular and frequent aspects of his work. He learnt reading Bangla when he came to his maternal uncle's in Calcutta during vacations. He has an indelible impression of experiences on his temper. It would be right to call him a writer of experiences. His writing career has been influenced by his tutors Dan Jacobson and Karl Miller at University College, London, and Bishnu Prasad Chakraborty, "Mastermohai" of "Portrait of an Artist" and a number of writers in English like Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce as well as French writer Marcel Proust. He, however, feels no less indebted to writers in Indian languages, especially in Bengali for helping him to mould his career of creative writing.

Amit Chaudhuri admits himself that he is inspired by the lives around him. He tells to Fernando Galvan about it as- "I fell in some ways almost closer to Jibanand Das but that doesn't mean that I don't think Tagore a great writer and poet. But I think Ray's films meant a lot to me and later on the writer Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyaya from whose novel Ray created his first film Pather Panchali.....it's a very modernist novel in a sense."

The themes and techniques used by the writer in his novels are a true embodiment of his personal experiences like the idea of his first novel was also a result of one of the incident of his life. Amit Chaudhuri, before writing 'ASASA', had read a comment about the novel of William Golding named 'Lord of the Flies.' In that comment, there was the criticism about the explanatory opening sequence about the beginning with the boy arriving at the island. Chaudhuri grasped the idea from their comment and weaves his novel with explanatory sequence from the starting of the novel. In it

he gave the details about the life in Bombay and starts with arrival of the boy in Calcutta.

Afternoon Raag, the second novel of the writer too had the same story. In this novel, Chaudhuri reveals his personal experiences at Oxford, or we may say that it would not have existed if Amit had no connection with the foreign air. The loose structure of the novel shows the immature thinking of the novelist at that time. So, once again it becomes quite apparent that his life has a major contribution in the creation of such wonder full masterpiece of English literature.

## DISCUSSIONS

Rini Dwivedi, a literary expert stressed on the fact that novels of Amit are inspired by personal experiences. She says as-

“The novel has been termed as oxford raga by a reviewer. It may appear to be so. The bulk of the space and time in the novel is occupied by Oxford”.

She further says, especially in context to Afternoon Raag, the title, “Afternoon Raag, itself is telling the extent of influence of personal life on pattern of writing of Chaudhuri. The Raag sang in the afternoon embodies the moods generated by it. In India, Afternoon is the time to relax, to rest and to restore. In a broader sense, it also symbolizes the evening of life surely a time before a men leaves this world forever. This novel brings in front two kinds of inspirations. One is his guru, his source of inspection for narration. And the second is love relations with Shehnaz and Mandira”.

The success of ‘Afternoon Raag’ depends upon its innocent and immaturity loose depiction of the characters influencing the life of the narrator positively. The word positively used here because of the framing pattern of the characters, that the writer conceived and formulated second award winning novel of his career.

The initial work of Amit clearly displays the immature and concessive mental state of the author. Amit Chaudhuri has spent most of his time outside India to attain education but his basic instinct of shyness and hesitation pertains there and this shyness peeps through his writings.

The stories of Amit somehow depict the influence of life and its experiences and have played a vital role in transforming his nature and personality of Amit Chaudhuri. And it is obvious, we all perform and do only those deeds which are according to our interest as in case of Amit we can see that as a child he was very sensitive so, all the child character whether it is Sandeep or Babla or Bonny etc. are very innocent and are very keen observers. Amit likes dry clothes as they fascinate him, so they are mentioned in all his stories. He loves water and includes watery activities anyhow in all his novels. Similarly, he likes food and makes it a permanent part of all his creations.

About he Sheobhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla says-

“Chaudhuri too relates himself to our rich cultural and literary traditions and makes emotional fullness, akin to ‘Bhavas’ in Sanskrit, and suggestiveness, akin to ‘Dhwani’, the two mantras of his writing. This, however does not mean that he disowns the Western literary traditions which has influenced him in large measure. In fact in exploring the alternative tradition for his creative writing he takes recourse to syncretism, combining both the east and west.”

The culture and architecture of india always fascinated the writer. Again for him, it is the idea of life as a text, of inferiorities of experience, of things enclosed, of being able to look from one space to another. His writings are the notifications of a determined camera which panes slowly leaving no object without observation. So, he loved those

films-Renoir, certain French films-which showed one looking from a window of one house into the window of another house. He loved these scenes. Reader can always notice numerous instances in his writing where protagonist or other characters peeps into the lives of others through balconies or windows.

Amit liked a movie 'Les Enfants du Paradis' (The children of God). In this movie the Gods were the audience and the children were the actors. It had this shot of the tenement house moving through one space to another, talking from one person to another, in the verandah and the camera captures it. He also loved the opening of Naipaul's *Miguel Street* where one man was talking to another man in a different verandah. These movies influenced the writing of Amit to a great extent. He also as a narrator becomes a kind of ghost who was not seen, who saw life unfolding before him and also inside something.

One of the descriptions from his novel *ASASA* given below shows close and keen observant sense of author and makes us realize that how closely he has experienced life and how beautifully he has penned it down-

"They had shut all the windows and closed the shutters so that the room was a large box covered by a lid, cool and dark and spacious inside. And they were like tiny insects living in the darkness of the box, breathing in the air of the world through invisible perforations. Whenever there was a power cut, they fanned themselves meditatively with newspapers or bamboo fans, and the children deserted the bed and boy down or sat down on the floor, because the floor was a stone slap of coolness, an expense of warm ice that would not met. Sandeep's aunt and mother lay on the bed murmurings to each other, and each time they turned, there was a shy and subtle clink of bangles. And whenever the power returned, the fan whirled at full speed, and the silent room filled with its gentle, understated hum. Shonamama was sitting on the stool in the far side of the room, reading a book by the light of a single lamp. It seemed strange, that lamp shining in the daytime, and the room so dark, as if night had fallen inside it."

In 'Freedom Song' also, the influence of personal life on its theme is clearly noticeable. Here too, Amit's tendency to note the things keenly and completely is visible. All the characters of the novel seems to be inspired with real life characters. Moreover not only the main characters but supporting cast too has influence of realism on them.

R.S. Sharma, a well known literary critic supports this statement as-

"Khuku's is not the only consciousness that filters or reflects the reality to us. Shib, Mini, Bhola and other Characters also disseminate their impressions. The narrative as Adam Mars Jones has noted "Flits from mind to mind" (Extract from review in Chaudhuri, 1998. In Pankaj Mishra's view Chaudhuri, as a novelist, is "a camera, a slow tracking one, observing places and people from continually changing angles ("Extract form a review in Chaudhuri, 1998)."

Amit loves Calcutta and this love reveals itself time to time in all his novels. In 'freedom song' too, representing the passing reality of Calcutta life is an important feature of the novel. The author represents the reality more sincerely is comparison to the respective character. The writer describes the feelings of Bhola who had come to the city thirty years ago and got married as-

"Since then, its air had changed; tell now a numbers of smoke and dust and fumes surrounded it always. But he loved it as one who had come here and made his life here. Here he had launched his small business, here he had his children, Bhaskar, Manik, and Piyu, they had gone to the same school and read Bengali and English and read the same subjects, and in them, in the way they spoke and in what they spoke of, he saw Calcutta more truly than in himself, they were the children of the city."

This journey (mentioned above) of Bhola, more or less seems to be inspired by the real life of Amit Chaudhuri. He also moved to England, to study at Oxford. Over there, he adjusted himself well like Bhola. He adopted and accepted all the rights and tradition of that country happily and fined himself not different from that land.

SheobhshanShukal and Anu Shukla says-

“Chaudhuri’s “Intellectual Make-up” is western and “Emotional Make- up” is Indian but he makes a serious endeavor to put the separating line under erasure and to explore and reinvent the alternative tradition in the Indian novel written in English. So for we have had two distinct literary traditions, one being the tradition of social and metaphysical realism of the ‘big-three’ and the other of magic realism and national allegory of the children of *Midnight’s children*. Of course, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand are considered to be modernist and Amit Chaudhuri has all the likings and admirations for them.”

As a person, Amit never confined himself to one nation or culture. Rather he disliked the term ‘post-colonial’. He picks things from the life around and never bothers about their belongings. This quality of writing makes a little bit different from other contemporary writers as he finds whole world as a unit and is feeble to see any difference between the experiences of native land other countries.

He told to Galvan: ‘I am not altogether happy with the term ‘Post-colonial’, because it defines everything in connection to the experience of colonization which only has a pretty narrow, one dimensional, meaning.”

Amit Chaudhuri personally believes in an alternative tradition in the writing and this belief of the writer is the base of his themes of novels. He himself accepts this fact in the following statement-

“Now the kind of India I write about is a lower middle-class-or middle-class India, and not just India, because I write about Calcutta in particular and Bengal, a post-independence Bengal reality, lyricizing the experiences of the middle- class and the spaces in which they live, I am not writing about a fantastic India. I am not writing about historical India, although I might not be writing directly about history. The very fact that I am writing about real people means, I think, I am writing about people in history.”

In ‘Freedom Song’, the narrator’s self-mixes so properly with character’s personality and uplift the impact of the theme. Such as in case of Bhaskar who in course of rehearsing tragic speeches in the little plays, plunged into thoughts that are probably too deep for him. One can only illustrate such feeling when he too must have close encounter of self with akin situations and Amit has got masters in that.

The narrator feels sympathy for the people who belong to middle- class. He also wants to portray the impact of political activities on lives of common men. Unlike other writers, who represents adulterated writings while describing any event or detail. Amit Chaudhuri represents the reality.

R.S. Sharma says in this respect- “whenever we meet with pure un-adulterating narrative voice, we find it subjective and poetic as in the best impressionistic writing even when describing a realistic scene, or relating a historical detail of event. The time of communal tension is etched out through the deep effect it had on the lives of poor people.”

“A New World” next novel of Amit Chaudhuri, is in the queue which again becomes an evident of this reality that Amit is very much influenced with the span of life. This novel too has inspirational moldings through the vision of

Chaudhuri.

Rini Dwivedi once again helps with her verdict about Chaudhuri as-

“Chaudhuri’s images are drawn from his wide experiences of life so minutely observed but when they are used to vivify the ordinary reality, they are charged with poetry with the effect of the familiar and the strange going hand in hand with each other. The way people usually read stories provides an apt image for a very dissimilar kind of feeling – Admiral Chatterjee’s interest in his younger son.”

Amit has noticed this feeling of regression in old people. Like he says in the same novel “They don’t understand this term ‘planning’.”. Similarly, the characterization of Dr. Sen is also an embodiment of social behavior. In spite of being so educated, he was surprised to hear about the divorce of Jayojit. Such characters are very frequently visible around us, who in spite of being educated and superficially modern, pertains some old stereotype thinking on issues. Following coding provides strength to this comment and signifies that the author also similar experiences from life.

“Even Dr. Sen, the cardiologist who lived on the eight floor in the same building and visited Admiral Chatterjee whenever required, is astonished when he learns about this divorce. He cannot believe “that these things which he’d only remotely heard about could actually happen to real people.”

Real time, published in the year 2002, is his fifth novel. It is a collection of short stories based mainly on the life of Calcutta or Mumbai. This choice of depiction of the life of only two cities mainly states that Amit Chaudhuri cannot come out of his memories and experiences related to the places to his past or present. And that’s why his stories are the true modulations of the lives of the common men around him. He avoids adding some kind of superficial flavor to add goodness to his stories, which sometimes troubles the readers.

Amit Chaudhuri is deeply attached to his birth place. He loves it, he adores it, he relishes it and he always celebrates it.

Aileen says, “Chaudhuri writes universal themes of human struggle among various elements and settings. Though the stories in this book were uneven (in terms of quality and tone), I enjoyed being transported between Calcutta and Mumbai. The end of the first story, “Portrait of an Artist, “sums up many of the people I’ve met here, “Calcutta was his universe, like a dew drop, it holds within it the light and colours of the entire world.”

As the life has influenced the themes of the writings of Chaudhuri, it has similar effect on his writing technique too. The writer continuously uses all the facts to put forward all those aspects which are close to his heart. He uses the term ‘Verandah’ very frequently in his novel because when he was in England, one of the things which distressed him was the lack of balconies or verandahs. There was a very clear demarcation between inside and outside. The windows remained closed because of the cold and one would therefore be very alone with oneself and consciousness. When Amit came back to India, to St. Cyril Road, he found that his consciousness was never alone with itself, part of it was outside and there were many sounds inside (it was on the third floor.) and that signified to him a stream of the subconscious and all these things played on his mind when he was writing the novel.

Sheobhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla says

“Verandah’ and ‘afternoon’ figure quite frequently in the works of Amit Chaudhuri as spatial and temporal motifs. Many of his characters love sitting or standing in verandah, which for the writer is ‘an in-between space’, ‘with no

inside or outside ‘and ensures the ‘mental who is not seen’, who sees life unfolding before him and is get also inside something” (Aalap 178). However, “verandah” as a semiotic encodes indeterminacy or ambivalence more than neutrality.” (23).

Like ‘verandah’, Streets are very dear to Amit. So the discussion of them occupies a special place in his writings. For him, they are the sites where much happens, especially the tropical streets, the streets in India as opposed to streets in England. When he stayed there, the windows were closed; he could hear people going to work. There was an underground hereby. He could hear women heels clicking tarried sometimes because there was a garage where they could admire new cars. Around this time the read an article by ‘Naipaul’ where he says that the tropical climate allows a man to lead half his life in the open. So, people were leading half their experiences, their moments of joys and sorrows and hiatuses before each other, in front of his eyes on the streets, loitering, talking, not returning homes-over there all that was happening in a closed space in England. The streets, therefore, is not only a medium which is used by the people to go from one place to another. It is a place where Amit has passed a part of his life. It is like any other part of home for him, that’s why it is so important to him and is a permanent guest in all his thoughts.

In ‘Freedom Song’, Amit added a stage play. For it, he said, “It started out as being one of the reason for writing the novel and it ended by becoming a sort of absence because I found out that I could not actually sit down and write about the play. The actual enactment of the play, when I had seen it in real life, moved me so much not in the political sense, that such kind of a street culture existed in Calcutta and the forlornness of this hope because the people looking for the balcony, this illusory kind of overlapping between home and outside, audience and enactment. You are not sure which one is the audience and which one is the play. Again, the ephemerality which I’ m always interested in, this is not going to be staged again even what is done to the city during the pujas as well. I’ve written about that but not in any novel, when it come to actually writing about it, something in me rebelled against it-I said to myself that I won’t show the play being stages in the novel.”

Apart from this, the names of the character of the novels are inspired by the real life experience of the writer. Especially, names of the servants like Saraswati, Nimai, Nando, Chhaya& Maya etc. For him, these names have the ability of belonging to a person in a way. As a writer, he begins with the assumption that he can’t use these names because that name could not have been any other person. So, names are fairly important although the origin of ‘Sandeep’ is not clear to Amit also. He does not seems to be very happy with it. He appears to be very satisfied with the names of his characters especially with names like ‘Nimai’ and ‘Saraswati.’

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper is a sincere effort to throw some light on the life of Amit Chaudhuri. His life and experiences related to it have caused a great impact on his pen. The purpose of this piece of research is to lime light that impact which is the foundation of such wonderful creations by the writer. As an artist Amit creatively juxtaposed everything which excited him. The impact of life course is visible on his writing skills. He represents life beautifully, in a serene manner which infatuates all readers from all sects of life. He attempts to do the something new with old issues and does it successfully. His links with corners granted him a talent of incorporating words and phrases of different languages with English which in turn impart a unique feature to his writing. Words and expressions from languages other than English and even English equivalents of these expressions are artfully contextualized to make them yield their meaning to those who speak and

understand English only. It would not be wrong to call Amit Chaudhuri as an observer of everyday life or modern Indian manners. It is his accurate assessment. He is an experimenter in form. Everyday interested him as an intensely vivid, energetic vibrant entity against the abstract and the epic. It was always implicitly against something, and that's why it possessed for him such energy and possibility.

Above discussion verifies that Amit Chaudhuri has immense influence of his personal life on his writing skills. He observes everything around him very closely. And it is either the surrounding or his own choice about them which is responsible for his uniqueness in writing. His quality of writing stays in his mannerism which is a byproduct of his past and present. Unlike other writers he chooses those situations which had nothing new or surprising, and from Amit coins pleasant surprises for the lovers of novels. Amit always face a paradoxical pull between the native land and elsewhere. This conflict of thoughts is revealing throughout his work. The writer feels great dichotomy between close and far, instead seeing the two as 'enmeshed intimately'.

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